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General Assembly

Fifty-sixth session

Official Records

63rd plenary meeting
Monday, 26 Novembe 2001, 3 p.m.
New York

President: Mr. Han Seung-soo ..... (Republic of Korea)

The meeting was called to order at 3.10 p.m.

In the absence of the President, Mr. Rosenthal (Guatemala), Vice-President, took the Chair.

Agenda item 20

Strengthening of the coordination of humanitarian and disaster relief assistance of the United Nations, including special economic assistance

Report of the Secretary-General (A/56/384 and Corr.1)

(a) Strengthening of the coordination of emergency humanitarian assistance of the United Nations

Reports of the Secretary-General (A/56/95, A/56/307)

Note by the Secretary-General (A/55/649)

Draft resolution (A/56/L.14)

(b) Special economic assistance to individual countries or regions

Reports of the Secretary-General (A/56/158, A/56/264, A/56/269, A/56/338, A/56/361, A/56/389, A/55/412, A/56/470 and A/56/632)

Draft resolutions (A/56/L.15, L.16)

(c) Strengthening of international cooperation and coordination of efforts to study, mitigate and minimize the consequences of the Chernobyl disaster

Report of the Secretary-General (A/56/447)

(d) Participation of volunteers, "White Helmets", in the activities of the United Nations in the field of humanitarian relief, rehabilitation and technical cooperation for development

Report of the Secretary-General (A/56/308)

(e) Assistance to the Palestinian people

Report of the Secretary-General (A/56/123 and Corr.1)

The Acting President (*spoke in Spanish*): I now invite the representative of Greece to introduce draft resolution A/56/L.14.

Mr. Gounaris (Greece): It is an honour for me to take the floor in order to introduce to the Plenary Assembly, a humanitarian draft resolution on "Emergency response to disasters", tabled jointly by the Permanent Missions of Greece and Turkey, under agenda item 20 (a).

Two years ago, I had the honour to present with my Turkish colleague, a resolution on the subject, resolution 54/30, adopted by consensus on 22

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01-65745 (E)

November 1999, during the fifty-fourth session of the General Assembly.

This time, as already announced by the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Greece, Mr. George A. Papandreou, during the general debate, the draft resolution before you reflects the steps already taken by the two countries to cooperate against natural disasters, namely, earthquakes, landslides or floods.

As a follow-up to our initial decision, the formation of a Joint Hellenic-Turkish Standby Disaster Response Unit is now a reality.

Let me remind you that the idea for the Joint Standby Disaster Response Unit came from the suffering of the victims of the devastating earthquakes that consecutively hit Turkey and Greece in 1999. The Governments of the two countries, motivated by the mutual assistance offered voluntarily by their people, decided to promote a bilateral arrangement that could not only enhance cooperation between Greece and Turkey to deal with natural disasters but also serve to supplement existing structures of the United Nations system.

In the time that has elapsed since the adoption of the first resolution, Greece and Turkey, in close collaboration with the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) in Geneva, participated in a series of meetings aiming at defining the operational modalities for the Unit. A common understanding was reached concerning its scope and structure. Focal points were immediately established in Athens and Ankara.

Following consultations, a protocol on the formation of the Joint Hellenic-Turkish Standby Disaster Response Unit was signed by the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Greece and the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Turkey.

Allow me to give some more details on the operational aspects of the Unit, while the Permanent Representative of Turkey, Mr. Pamir, will later elaborate on the framework of cooperation of the Unit with OCHA.

According to the terms of reference of the protocol, the Unit has the following areas of operation: urban search and rescue, rescue and relief operations, emergency medical care and technical expertise in disaster management.

This Unit is ready to offer its services, regionally and internationally, under the auspices of the Secretary-General, primarily in the Mediterranean region or in any other part of the world, if needed. Greece would like to reiterate its decision to fully share with Turkey the operational costs of the Unit.

The common steps taken by the two countries to address the devastation of natural disasters have been fully supported and enriched with the experience of the United Nations Secretariat.

In this context, I would like to thank the Under-Secretary-General, Mr. Kenzo Oshima, as well as the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs of the Secretariat, for their full support for this joint initiative.

Greece fully aligns itself with the statement of the European Union presidency, to be delivered presently by Ambassador Jean de Ruyt, Permanent Representative of Belgium, under this agenda item.

Natural disasters, as underlined in the relevant report of the Secretary-General, affect many parts of the world. Rapid urbanization, environmental degradation, climate change and the depletion of natural resources are among the factors contributing to the increased vulnerability of communities all over the world to natural disasters.

This initiative has been widely welcomed as fully complying with and promoting the purposes and principles of the Charter of the United Nations. To date, an overwhelming number of Member States have sponsored the draft resolution contained in document A/56/L.14.

On behalf of my Government, I would like to express our deepest appreciation for the Assembly's support.

I hope that this draft resolution, which aims to send a message of support by Greece and Turkey for the efforts of the United Nations towards natural disaster reduction, will be adopted by consensus.

The Acting President (*spoke in Spanish*): I give the floor to the representative of Turkey, also to introduce draft resolution A/56/L.14.

Mr. Pamir (Turkey): I am taking the floor today to introduce, together with my Greek colleague, a joint draft resolution entitled "Emergency response to disasters", submitted by Turkey and Greece under

agenda item 20(a), as contained in document A/56/L.14.

As eloquently explained by Ambassador Gounaris, the idea of forming the joint Hellenic-Turkish standby disaster response unit, referred to in this draft resolution, emerged in the aftermath of the devastating earthquakes that hit Turkey and Greece in 1999. The catalyst for the idea was not the earthquakes per se, but rather the exemplary show of solidarity, support and understanding for each other's grief that was manifested spontaneously by the Turkish and Greek peoples.

Natural disasters do not recognize national borders, religions or nationalities. Furthermore, because of the frequency, magnitude and effects of such disasters, the rescue and relief capabilities of any given nation are not generally sufficient to deal with them.

In the light of their experiences with the earthquakes of 1999, Turkey and Greece recognized the merit of pooling their capabilities for future possible contingencies. While doing so, however, they also wanted to make their capabilities available to others, on a larger scale. That is the thrust of the draft resolution that my Greek colleague and I have the pleasure of introducing to the Assembly.

The Assembly will recall that initially, the General Assembly adopted resolution 54/30 on 22 November 1999, which Turkey and Greece had again jointly submitted as a precursor to the present draft. In the two years that have elapsed since the adoption of that resolution, Turkey and Greece, in close cooperation with the United Nations, through the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), have completed the necessary preparations for the establishment of the unit. The Foreign Ministers of the two countries have recently signed the relevant protocol.

I will not dwell upon various aspects of that protocol, as my Greek colleague has already done so in a most efficient manner. I would, however, like to briefly outline the envisaged framework for cooperation with the United Nations.

The joint Hellenic-Turkish Standby Disaster Response Unit, in conformity with the International Strategy for Disaster Reduction, aims at reinforcing and expanding the United Nations system's existing arrangements. It is fully aligned with United Nations efforts to mitigate the impact of natural disasters.

The unit, comprising an equal number of members from Turkey and Greece, will use assets provided by the two countries and will have no financial implications for the programme budget of the United Nations. Operational costs will be fully absorbed by the national budgets of the two countries.

While the unit is established on a bilateral basis, OCHA has been made an integral part of its activities. As such, OCHA will attend, on an ad hoc basis, the meetings of the Coordinating Committee of the Unit; provide input to the training activities of the members of the two teams; cooperate in the planning and conduct of field exercises twice a year; ensure interoperability between the working procedures of the teams; ensure response preparedness through links between the unit and the scientific community; and evaluate lessons learned from the Unit's operations.

The geographical area of its operations is defined by, but not limited to, the peri-Mediterranean area and the general vicinity of the parties.

The joint Hellenic-Turkish Disaster Response Unit is the fruit of a cooperative engagement between Turkey and Greece, in full collaboration with the United Nations through OCHA. The first seeds of this endeavour were reflected in resolution 54/30 of November 1999. This new draft resolution is a follow-up to the previous one and reflects the developments that have taken place since then.

I join my Greek colleague in expressing our desire to have the Assembly's support for the draft resolution. I should also like to thank the United Nations, and in particular OCHA, for its invaluable support in the formation of the unit. I am confident that, with the dedication and determination that Turkey and Greece have shown in this respect, and the continued support of OCHA, the joint Hellenic-Turkish Standby Disaster Response Unit will be a success and come to serve as an example for such endeavours in future.

The Acting President (*spoke in Spanish*): I give the floor to the representative of Tajikistan to introduce draft resolution A/56/L.15.

Mrs. Lapshina (Tajikistan): I have the honour to introduce, on behalf of its sponsors, the draft resolution entitled "Emergency international assistance for peace,

normalcy and rehabilitation in Tajikistan", contained in document A/56/L.15.

Since the publication of the draft resolution, the following countries have become sponsors: Armenia, Austria, Azerbaijan, Belgium, Canada, China, Croatia, Finland, France, Georgia, Germany, the Islamic Republic of Iran, Italy, Japan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Luxembourg, Malta, Morocco, Netherlands, Norway, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, the United Kingdom, the United States and Uzbekistan.

The draft resolution was discussed at the informal consultations chaired by Mr. Hubert Wurth, Permanent Representative of Luxembourg to the United Nations. Valuable proposals were made for the improvement of the text, and agreement was reached on all paragraphs.

In particular, my delegation is grateful for the contributions made by the delegations of the European Union and the Russian Federation, and we would like to extend our sincere appreciation to the other sponsors and other delegations for the good spirit of cooperation and partnership which prevailed during the consultations.

By the draft resolution, the General Assembly would recognize that the United Nations has played a successful and important role in the peace process in Tajikistan and would call on it to continue its assistance to Tajikistan in post-conflict peace-building.

It would also express appreciation to the States, the United Nations, the European Union, the World Bank and other intergovernmental organizations and all relevant humanitarian organizations, agencies and non-governmental organizations, including the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, that have responded, and continue to respond, positively to the humanitarian needs of Tajikistan.

The draft resolution notes with regret that the humanitarian situation has not improved, owing to severe economic deterioration and the prevailing drought, and that significant humanitarian needs continue to exist throughout Tajikistan.

The General Assembly would welcome the intention of the Secretary-General to continue the United Nations humanitarian programme in Tajikistan by issuing a consolidated inter-agency appeal for humanitarian assistance to Tajikistan for 2002, taking into account current developments in the region, and would urge Member States to fully fund programmes included in the appeal. Furthermore, the General Assembly would call on the Secretary-General to continue re-evaluating all United Nations humanitarian assistance activities in Tajikistan with a view to preparing a common humanitarian strategy that would support the relief and recovery operations during the transitional period from relief to development, with a major focus on promoting self-reliance and sustainable development.

Finally, the draft resolution suggests that at its fifty-seventh session the General Assembly consider the question of the situation in Tajikistan under the item entitled "Strengthening of the coordination of humanitarian and disaster relief assistance of the United Nations, including special economic assistance".

My delegation and the other sponsors hope that the draft resolution contained in document A/56/L.15 will be adopted by consensus.

The Acting President (*spoke in Spanish*): I call on the representative of the Bahamas to introduce draft resolution A/56/L.16.

Mr. Rolle (Bahamas): I have the honour to introduce, on behalf of the Caribbean Community, the draft resolution entitled "Emergency assistance to Belize", contained in A/56/L.16. I should like to announce that, since the issuance of the draft resolution, the following countries have become sponsors: Argentina, Austria, Bangladesh, Belgium, Brazil, Croatia, Cuba, Ecuador, Finland, France, Germany, Guyana, Japan, Luxembourg, Malta, the Netherlands, Norway, Paraguay, Qatar, South Africa, Spain, the Syrian Arab Republic and the United Kingdom.

The draft resolution highlights the devastation and extensive damage caused by hurricane Iris on 8 October 2001. It also highlights the human suffering caused by the displacement of thousands of people, the negative ecological impact on the coastal region and the enormous efforts required to alleviate the devastation caused by that natural disaster.

It urges Member States, as a matter of urgency, to contribute generously to the relief, rehabilitation and reconstruction efforts of Belize. It also requests the Secretary-General, in collaboration with the international financial institutions and agencies and bodies of the United Nations, to assist the Government

of Belize in identifying medium-term and long-term needs and in mobilizing resources, and appreciates the assistance provided by the international community, international agencies, inter-governmental organizations and non-governmental organizations that are currently providing emergency relief to Belize.

I request that draft resolution A/56/L.16 be adopted by consensus.

The Acting President (*spoke in Spanish*): Before proceeding, I should like to inform members that, in a letter dated 22 October 2001 addressed to the President of the General Assembly, the Permanent Representative of Ireland to the United Nations, in his capacity as Chairman of the Group of Western European and other States for the month of October, requests that the General Assembly hear, in plenary meeting, a statement by the observer of Switzerland in the debate on agenda item 20.

In view of the importance attached to the issue under discussion, it is proposed that the General Assembly take a decision on that request.

May I take it that there is no objection to the proposal to hear a statement by the observer of Switzerland in the debate on item 20?

It was so decided.

Mr. De Loecker (Belgium) (*spoke in French*): I have the honour to speak on behalf of the European Union. The Central and Eastern European countries associated with the European Union — Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Romania, Slovakia and Slovenia — and the other associated countries, Cyprus, Malta and Turkey, as well as the European Free Trade Area country member of the European Economic Area, Iceland, align themselves with this statement.

It was as a result of an initiative by the European Union that, exactly 10 years ago, the item entitled "Strengthening of the coordination of humanitarian emergency assistance of the United Nations" was placed on the agenda of the General Assembly. Events in recent weeks have once again demonstrated the importance and necessity of the effective coordination of humanitarian operations carried out by the international community. The European Union has always supported United Nations efforts to improve the coordination of aid and assistance.

Afghanistan, which has suffered an unprecedented drought and has also been torn apart by conflict for over 20 years, has for some time been greatly dependent on aid from the international community. Events in recent months have only worsened what was already a disastrous situation. The European Union is pleased that the humanitarian aspects have received as much attention from the international community as the political, diplomatic, military and economic aspects.

On a more general note, the European Union has often argued, in particular in the context of implementing the recommendations of the Brahimi report, for a more integrated approach when setting up peacekeeping or peacemaking operations, in synergy with humanitarian activities, without encroaching upon the necessary independence of the latter or the integrity of the humanitarian area. The Union hopes that this global approach, now adopted for the first time, will also be taken during future crises. The European Union is convinced that this makes it possible not only to help those in need more effectively, but also better to prepare the post-crisis phase.

The Union commends the excellent work undertaken by Mr. Kenzo Oshima, Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator, and his entire team at the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs. The manner of their response — serious, prompt and determined — is proof of the huge progress made to strengthen coordination within the United Nations system. The European Union encourages Mr. Oshima to continue his mission in this fashion and calls on the Member States and agencies of the United Nations to lend him their full support.

The European Union emphasizes the importance of a holistic approach to all crises. It is convinced of the absolute necessity of taking into particular account the following factors: the situation of women, children, the elderly and the handicapped; respect for human rights; the distribution of food; health care; accommodation; mine-clearing operations; and reconstruction. If we are to succeed, the coordination of all agencies, funds, programmes and organizations involved in such efforts is now more essential than ever.

The donor alert issued during the Afghan crisis has the virtue of having mobilized the international

community in a very short space of time by submitting concrete proposals. The European Union has responded by contributing over €320 million.

On the tenth anniversary of the adoption of resolution 46/182 by the General Assembly on 19 December 1991, we would reaffirm its vital importance as a fundamental step in the international community's efforts to enhance the effectiveness of humanitarian operations in response to natural disasters and complex crises alike. The various instruments created then have lost none of their relevance. This was, moreover, pointed out by all delegations during the humanitarian segment of the Economic and Social Council in July.

In view of its vital role as a coordinating instrument of the United Nations, we would encourage all humanitarian organizations to take an active part in the process of consolidated inter-agency appeals. In many cases, these have become genuinely strategic documents endorsed by the entire humanitarian community. In this respect, we welcome the various improvements made since the process was launched almost 10 years ago. These include, for instance, updates to various consolidated appeals, prioritizing, flexibility in appeals launched at the regional level and the mainstreaming of such cross-cutting concerns as gender and human rights when defining appeals. Nevertheless, further clarification of the objectives of consolidated appeals in terms of funding and strategic coordination and planning would be desirable. In this regard, the Secretary-General's report mentions an innovative approach in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, combining the consolidated appeals process, the country strategy paper and the United Nations Development Assistance Framework in a single document. The Union supports initiatives of that kind.

The European Union, through its member States and the European Commission Humanitarian Aid Office, is by far the largest contributor to humanitarian aid. In 2000, it contributed 47.6 per cent of total public-sector humanitarian aid, that is, slightly over €1.5 billion.

Of course, the European Union intends to continue and even to enhance its contribution to the United Nations work, as borne out by the communication adopted by the European Commission on 2 May, entitled "Building an effective partnership with the United Nations in the fields of development and humanitarian affairs". Furthermore, the Development Council adopted several decisions to that effect on 31 May 2001, especially emphasizing that the choice of United Nations partners and the extent of cooperation with them should be linked to their comparative advantage emanating from universally recognized mandates, their operational performance and, ultimately, their overall ability to address efficiently and effectively the needs of affected populations in accordance with international humanitarian law. The Council also recognized the importance of more predictable and sustained funding for the United Nations agencies, with more flexible modalities, and insisted on the need for a more systematic political dialogue between the European Union and the United Nations.

The European Union acknowledges the important role played by the Inter-Agency Standing Committee and is pleased with the way it is working. It would, nevertheless, like to be better informed of progress made within the Committee, which could occur during regular briefings for the Member States.

The European Union would like to thank the Secretary-General for his report in document A/55/649 on enhancing the functioning and utilization of the Central Emergency Revolving Fund. Given the importance of that instrument for the United Nations role as coordinator, the Union realizes that it is in need of reform in order to optimize its utilization. To that end, the Union is willing to cooperate with other delegations in order to study the Secretary-General's proposals.

The European Union recalls that the humanitarian segment of the Economic and Social Council is an essential part of the mandate delegated to the Council. In that regard, the Union is delighted at the excellent debate conducted at Geneva in July of this year and would like to emphasize the quality of the presidency's summary adopted at the end of July's humanitarian debate. The document translates the broad consensus concerning the importance of greater coordination of efforts to enhance the effectiveness of humanitarian operations in response to natural disasters and complex crises. Resolution 46/182 is, moreover, the benchmark for coordination.

The prevention of natural disasters and the responses to them are an important issue for the European Union. We thus welcome the establishment by the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian

Affairs of United Nations regional disaster evaluation and coordination teams for Latin America, Asia and the Pacific. We support the plan to create two other teams for Latin America and the Caribbean and for southern Africa. Given that it is vital for relief workers to be operational in a very short space of time, we would like to stress the importance of prevention, prior planning and early warning systems, and of the development of an adequate response capacity at both the local and the regional levels. In this regard, the European Union welcomes the draft resolutions submitted earlier by the Governments of Greece and Turkey to establish in the near future a joint Hellenic-Turkish standby disaster response unit.

As regards prevention, technical and technological progress is increasingly making it possible, among other things, to detect areas at risk and to assess potential damage. Technology is also contributing, following disasters, to better coordination of humanitarian operations, particularly in communications. The European Union is convinced that it is essential to be able to make rapid use of telecommunications in order to reduce the loss of human life, suffering and damage caused by disasters. In this respect, the Union would urge the States Members of the United Nations to sign and ratify the Tampere Convention.

This year, the fiftieth anniversary of the Convention relating to the Status of Refugees, we would once again like to take the opportunity to encourage the countries that have not yet done so to ratify the Convention and the 1967 Protocol. We would also like to insist that prevention and coordination apply to all humanitarian situations, including those that generate refugees.

Conflict situations have worsened throughout the world in recent years to a worrisome extent. Ninety per cent of the victims are now civilians — especially women and children, who are sometimes deliberately targeted. The number of persons displaced within their own countries is increasing dramatically and now, at an estimated 25 million, is almost twice the figure for refugees. However, while refugees are granted special status and international care, the chief responsibility for protecting and safeguarding the rights of internally displaced persons lies with the State concerned.

The extent and diversity of the humanitarian needs of these populations require coordinated action. Therefore, we welcome the establishment of a small unit within the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs to enhance the efficiency and coordination of responses to the needs of displaced persons. In this connection, it is important for the unit to centralize an integrated response on the part of the system to internal displacement crises, and particularly to be able to carry out consistent work in evaluating such crises, to identify shortcomings and to put forward measures to best fill existing gaps. Support for operations on the ground must also be an important aspect of its work, as will be the development of suitable institutional mechanisms.

The unit must maintain close liaison with the Secretary-General's Representative for Internally Displaced Persons, Mr. Francis Deng, and in particular assist him in promoting the Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement. In this connection, the European Union reaffirms its support for these Principles, which are a benchmark for matters relating to displaced persons, and calls for their universal application. The Union also welcomes their application in Colombia, Angola and, in the near future, Georgia.

One of the main difficulties for humanitarian action is staff safety. Therefore, the European Union repeats its appeal to all parties concerned to fulfil their obligations unconditionally so that aid may be supplied in accordance with international humanitarian law. The Union will spare no effort at the political and diplomatic levels to ensure both that these principles are respected and that humanitarian workers are protected. Here, we would like to pay homage to the men and women who carry out their work in increasingly dangerous conditions, sometimes even at risk to their own lives. Events such as those in Georgia this October are purely and simply unacceptable, and such abominable acts must not go unpunished.

Moreover, it is essential that the perpetrators be given sentences commensurate with the seriousness of the offences committed. Therefore, we are pleased that the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court makes it a war crime to direct attacks intentionally against personnel, installations, equipment, units or vehicles deployed in a humanitarian assistance operation or peacekeeping operation in accordance with the United Nations Charter, provided they are entitled to the protection that international law on armed conflicts guarantees civilians and civilian property. Therefore, we urge States to ratify or accede

to the Rome Statute at the earliest opportunity. We also encourage States to sign or ratify the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child concerning the involvement of children in armed conflict.

Last year, the General Assembly decided that, at its fifty-sixth session, the Sixth Committee would examine the Secretary-General's report on the scope of legal protection under the 1994 Convention on the Safety of United Nations and Associated Personnel. The European Union, which has played a constructive part in discussions and negotiations, backs the proposal for the creation of an ad hoc group to address the question, which will meet in the first half of 2002. The Union favours drawing up a protocol to the 1994 Convention on the Safety of United Nations and Associated Personnel in order to extend it to all agents deployed in humanitarian operations under the auspices of the United Nations.

Having always attached great importance to this issue — in particular through the resolution it introduces each year under this item on its agenda, entitled "Safety and security of humanitarian personnel and protection of United Nations personnel" — the European Union reaffirms that measures to protect security, which play an essential part in the United Nations, must be developed under the regular budget so as to ensure adequate and predictable funding. The joint award of the Nobel Peace Prize to the United Nations and its Secretary-General, Kofi Annan, reminds us once more of the crucial role played by the Organization in matters of peace, and should induce us to take action to enable its staff to carry out its noble task under the best conditions.

Moreover, we insist on the importance of sharing the costs of the whole United Nations system fairly, as recommended by the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions in December 2000 in its report entitled "Safety and security of United Nations personnel". The Union thus supports the Secretary-General's recommendation that key provisions of the Convention, such as the obligation to prevent acts of aggression against members of peacekeeping operations, the obligation to consider acts of aggression committed against the members of such an operation as constituting crimes punishable by law, and the obligation to prosecute or extradite the perpetrators of such offences, be incorporated into the status-of-forces or status-of-missions agreements.

The European Union is pleased that in his report entitled "Safety and security of humanitarian personnel and protection of United Nations personnel", the Secretary-General insists on the importance of improving and strengthening inter-institutional collaboration by harmonizing the management of security of various players in the humanitarian community. The Union is pleased that the "culture of security awareness", the fruit of efforts by the Secretary-General himself, is beginning to have a tangible impact on staff security.

Allow me to conclude by once again paying tribute to the entire staff of the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, as well as all those who, on a day-to-day basis, accomplish such vital humanitarian tasks in the field. They fully deserve the support of all Member States, either through contributions or through measures to ensure their security and decent working conditions so that the United Nations banner can cease to be a target and instead become a guarantee of protection.

Mr. Kolby (Norway): Let me begin by thanking the Secretary-General for a very comprehensive and illuminating report on strengthening the coordination of emergency humanitarian assistance of the United Nations, contained in document A/56/95-E/2001/85. The United Nations must continue to pay close attention to how it exercises its coordination functions so as to make the most of the available resources. Though progress has been made, there is still room for improvement.

Following this general observation, I would like to make a few remarks on some points in the report in which my delegation takes a particular interest: the consolidated inter-agency appeals, the gap issue, internally displaced persons, and the safety and security of humanitarian personnel.

Norway continues to be a staunch supporter of the consolidated appeals process as a means of improving coordination of international humanitarian assistance, raising awareness and planning strategically. While welcoming the progress made so far towards appeals that are really consolidated, we realize that there are still considerable challenges to be met. The consolidated appeals for 2002 were launched earlier today, and it seems timely to bring up some of these challenges now.

First, it has turned out to be difficult to fulfil the requirements stipulated in the appeals. The report refers to a steady downward trend in the proportion of requirements met. This is a paradox, in that the more work that is put into improving the consolidated appeals process, the smaller the amount of funds they manage to mobilize. It goes without saying that a certain impact of underfunding will be to undermine the ability of the consolidated appeals process to serve as a strategic planning instrument with predictable donor response. In the same vein, the continued tendency of donors to favour bilateral assistance, especially when this comes at the expense of multilateral funding, reduces the coordination possibilities of the consolidated appeals process.

Of course, there are clear limits to how much the consolidated appeals process can improve in these circumstances. My delegation, for one, is pleased that the United Nations has identified the challenges and is seeking to find remedies. In this respect, efforts to achieve the full commitment at the field level by strengthening the resident humanitarian coordinator system are to be commended.

It is crucial for the United Nations to work even more closely with non-governmental organizations and other non-United Nations organizations, such as the Red Cross. In this respect, we support the Secretary-General's emphasis on strengthening and enhancing local capabilities as an ultimate goal. We share his view that, whenever possible, international efforts to prepare for and deal with humanitarian emergencies must increasingly be seen as complementary to those of local actors.

The strengthening of local organizations and networks is also important when it comes to the so-called gap issue. Over the years, we have seen too many examples of how protracted crises, once they are no longer in the media spotlight, have been paid too little attention by the international community until they flare up again. If we are to succeed in making lasting progress and solving the problems that have caused a crisis in the first place, more attention needs to be given to the period between the receipt of humanitarian assistance and the arrival of more long-term aid.

The Secretary-General's report calls for the more timely participation of development actors and improved donor funding throughout this transition period. For the first time, Norway will have a specific budgetary allocation next year for such gap projects. Countries emerging from a conflict situation will be likely candidates for funds from this allocation. In our view, this is one way of placing humanitarian assistance in broader development and peace-building frameworks.

During the past decade we have witnessed a considerable increase in the occurrence of natural disasters, while the number of protracted emergencies has also grown. It is worrisome that not even the minimum immediate financial requirements of the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs are being met today. This is also the case with the new small, inter-agency Internally Displaced Persons Unit, which is scheduled to be fully operational by next January. Norway has contributed to the Internally Displaced Persons Unit because we regard the high number of internally displaced as one of the main humanitarian challenges of our time. As such, it calls for the United Nations to play a stronger role.

I would like to take this opportunity to appeal to the members of the Inter-Agency Standing Committee that have not already done so to proceed with secondments to the Unit. We hope that this Unit can help fill the serious gaps in the humanitarian response to the needs of the internally displaced.

This brings me to the last point: reaching those in need. The humanitarian imperative may not know any borders, but those who respond to it must certainly take such political realities into account. The primary responsibility for meeting the needs of the internally displaced rests with the affected countries themselves. If they are not able to do so in an acceptable manner, the humanitarian imperative calls for the international community to become involved. International and national humanitarian workers must be granted access to those who need assistance, and the host Government and all parties involved must guarantee their safety and security.

We realize that this is a challenge, since violations of human rights and humanitarian law often lie at the core of a humanitarian emergency. Naturally, those who send or employ humanitarian staff must make every effort to ensure their safety. The financial implications of improving staff safety and security must be duly taken into account when assessing operational requirements.

My delegation has repeatedly emphasized the importance of the safety and security of humanitarian staff. There are too many tragic instances in which their safety has been jeopardized. This is unacceptable, and those responsible should be held accountable and brought to justice. This is our duty not only towards the entire humanitarian community, but also towards those who need assistance. If the security of humanitarian staff cannot be guaranteed, the ultimate victims will be those who will not receive the assistance they so desperately require. And, of course, affected populations may have no choice but to become displaced in search of assistance, thereby aggravating the problem.

In closing, I would like to endorse the statement in the report that "humanitarian assistance is not a solution in itself. It cannot be a substitute for political action." (*A/56/95, para. 13*) We should not only strive to take political action to remedy crises and catastrophes after the fact, but also take the necessary action to prevent these situations from occurring. Usually, prevention requires fewer resources than reparation, and maybe even less coordination.

We welcome the greater effort that has gone into strengthening the capacity of regional, national and local authorities in disaster-prone areas to plan and prepare for disaster and thus mitigate its consequences when it strikes. This is one example of the fact that the United Nations system is far better equipped today to handle natural disasters and complex emergencies than it was 10 years ago, when the landmark General Assembly resolution 46/182 on the coordination of humanitarian assistance was adopted. If not a cause for celebration, this, at least, should provide encouragement to continue and strengthen our efforts to meet the humanitarian needs of the many who deserve our solidarity and support.

Mr. Gamaleldin (Egypt) *(spoke in Arabic)*: Extending humanitarian assistance in cases of natural and man-made disasters is a noble and indispensable activity. Consolidating it and rendering it more effective is the duty of the international community as a whole. Assistance efforts should be provided through the United Nations to deal with natural disasters and the consequences of war, be they wars between countries or civil wars. Natural disasters remain the central focus of the international community, considering the enormous human loss of life emanating from them and the fact that 90 per cent of the victims are found in developing countries. They also lead to great material loss, which has been estimated by the Secretary-General to reach about $100 billion annually.

In spite of the fact that the number of wars between countries has decreased considerably, we notice a great and worrisome increase in the number of armed conflicts, which have led to increasing loss of life. They have also destroyed the material and human infrastructure and negatively affected development efforts exerted by these countries. In addition, they have led to unprecedented numbers of refugees and internally displaced persons.

Egypt is of the view that it is high time to discuss the question of safety and security of those who extend humanitarian assistance. We support the idea that we have to deal decisively with the threats and violence to which these people are subjected. Sometimes these people are detained or murdered. All these practices are condemned by international law. The main statute of the International Criminal Court includes such acts among crimes of war, which come under the jurisdiction of the Court. This positive step is designed to provide the necessary protection and to deter those who might contemplate the commission of such crimes.

Egypt calls upon all parties to armed conflict to respect the rights of humanitarian workers and to ensure their safety and security. We would like to reaffirm that the violations to which these workers are subjected constitute a threat and a violation of international law. At the same time, Egypt calls upon workers in this field to respect the principles of the United Nations Charter and international law, as well as the rules and regulations of host countries, their customs and traditions. They should also respect the guidelines annexed to General Assembly resolution 46/182 adopted in 1991.

Egypt requests that access to the civilian population — women, children and men — inside of any country should be carried out in a sound, legal manner, by obtaining prior consent from the host country with respect for its sovereignty, because the host country should assume the basic role of initiating, organizing and coordinating such processes on its territory. In order to prevent the workers from being exposed to danger, Egypt has always stressed the need that humanitarian assistance operations should not be accompanied by any activity that is likely to threaten the unity or territorial integrity of the host country.

Egypt believes that the extension of humanitarian assistance to civilians in time of war should be carried out with the consent of the countries concerned or upon their request. It should also fully respect the sovereignty, territorial integrity and political independence of these countries. It should not be used as a guise to carry out political ends pursued by some other country or a group of countries. When we speak about extending humanitarian assistance, we mean programmes carried out under the United Nations umbrella or by the International Committee for the Red Cross. Considering that these operations are carried out in accordance with agreements reached by the parties to the conflict, the latter have the duty to provide the necessary protection for participants. In other words, we do not agree that a non-governmental organization should, of its own accord, be allowed to take a decision to extend assistance to civilians in a specific country without obtaining the prior consent of the country. Although we agree that it is difficult to deal with such problems in cases where countries might, for one reason or another, not have a central government able to impose order on its territory, Egypt would like to invite the General Assembly to assume its role in determining the steps that should be pursued by the United Nations in these cases in a transparent way, involving the participation of all countries, big or small, and on an equal footing.

Egypt would like to emphasize that it fully condemns any violations to which civilians may be exposed in time of war. It joins the international community in calling upon all countries and parties to respect the rights of civilians and not to use them as scapegoats for political or military ends. We stress the need not to obstruct humanitarian assistance or to use civilians as human shields. This calls for the application of uniform standards in all cases. The rules of international law should be binding on every country, big and small alike, and the reaction of the international community should not be characterized by double standards.

In this connection, Egypt calls upon the international community to play a role in dealing with the humanitarian emergency faced by the Palestinian people, which is exposed to practices of killing, maiming, blockade and terrorism at the hands of the Israeli forces. This has caused a humanitarian tragedy for the Palestinian people. It has also undermined the Palestine Authority and has obstructed the arrival of humanitarian assistance. Thus, we appeal to the conscience of the world to save the Palestinian economy and institutions, to provide protection for the Palestinian people and to save the peace process in the Middle East.

In this context, Egypt would like to express its appreciation to the United Nations and to various international organizations and organs for the efforts they have deployed to assist the Palestinian people, either through the Special Coordinator or through the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA). We would also like to express our thanks to donor countries for their financial support and call upon them to increase that support during this critical period, including the response to the appeal made by the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA).

Egypt feels that internally displaced persons do not constitute an independent category. They are part and parcel of the civilian population and are therefore covered by the four Geneva Conventions. Therefore, what is presently required is to ensure respect for the provisions of these Conventions and not to invent new rules to protect one category of civilians at the expense of others. We also think that the task of protecting displaced persons is basically a responsibility that should be fully shouldered by their Governments. What is required on the part of the international community is to provide assistance to the Governments of countries that suffer from the phenomenon of internal displacement, so that they may be able to perform their role in extending assistance and providing protection to their citizens.

Egypt would like to reiterate its call to the representative of the Secretary-General to seek the views of all countries concerning the principles that he and a number of legal experts have drafted and to present a report to the General Assembly in this connection so that the Assembly may take the necessary steps regarding these principles. Egypt calls upon the United Nations Secretariat concerned with humanitarian affairs, particularly the Inter-Agency Standing Committee, to try to gradually acquaint the General Assembly with their activities and to acquaint the subcommittees with the reports concerning the situation of internally displaced persons and to develop steps that could be taken by the United Nations in this area.

Egypt would like to express its great appreciation for all the initiatives taken in the international arena aimed at furthering international cooperation in confronting natural disasters. We have joined the group of countries that have sponsored the draft resolution presented by two friendly countries, Turkey and Greece, concerning the establishment of a joint unit to deal with natural disasters under the auspices of the United Nations. We also support the draft resolution introduced by friendly Argentina concerning the participation of volunteers in the activities of the United Nations in the fields of humanitarian relief, rehabilitation and technical cooperation for development. Egypt would like to stress the importance of the General Assembly's leading role in following up on and providing humanitarian assistance in cases of natural disasters. It calls upon the United Nations and its specialized agencies and bodies to assist the countries in need in building their national and regional institutional capacities. Through the Economic and Social Council, it must give proper attention to strengthening to the greatest extent possible the coordination of the activities of all the organizations operating in this field, whether they are within the United Nations system or work with its relevant bodies, by implementing an integrated programme to deal with natural disasters, covering early warning, relief, reconstruction and, finally, the stage of development.

Egypt calls for disseminating the lessons learned from experience with previous disasters in various countries and for gathering special information on the available potentials to deal with such disasters at the regional and international levels. It should also be possible to make use of military and civil defence in dealing with natural disasters covered in the "Oslo guidelines".

Egypt stresses the need for all countries to participate in activities of the International Search and Rescue Advisory Group, which meets in Geneva. It calls upon the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) to acquaint the General Assembly with all the details concerning the activities of that Group and the ongoing discussions on the question of a legal framework for controlling international civil search and rescue.

Egypt believes that the provision of sufficient resources for humanitarian assistance is likely to help the specialized agencies to carry out their responsibilities. We would like to stress, in particular, that these resources should not be provided at the expense of those intended for development programmes in developing countries. We note with concern the statement by the Secretary-General, in paragraph 75 of his report in document A/56/95, that "the share of requirements met has shown a steady downward trend, from 80 per cent in 1994 to 59 per cent in 2000." As of May of this year, this share had not gone beyond 23 percent. Funding has also been characterized by imbalances from a geographical and sectoral viewpoint, which does not make it possible to provide the minimum required care.

Egypt therefore calls upon donor countries and international financial institutions to increase their contributions to relief and humanitarian assistance activities in order to fulfil the principle of international solidarity and responsibility and implement the spirit and the letter of the Charter. Egypt supports the proposals contained in the note by the Secretary-General (A/55/649) concerning enhancing the functioning and utilization of the Central Emergency Revolving Fund, aimed at ensuring a more efficient utilization of the Fund by expanding its use to support humanitarian assistance for natural disasters and protracted emergencies and for security arrangements for United Nations and associated personnel. We also support the Secretary-General's proposal to transfer $10 million from the Central Emergency Revolving Fund to a special trust fund to be established for humanitarian assistance in Africa. We call upon the Secretariat to present its ideas as regards the mechanisms of this Fund. The General Assembly is expected to review this project.

Mr. Satoh (Japan): At the outset, I would like to express, on behalf of the Government of Japan, my profound respect for and appreciation of personnel of the United Nations and of non-governmental organizations all over the world who are engaged, under very difficult conditions, in humanitarian relief activities. The courage and sense of responsibility shown by the Afghan staff — who have continued to carry out their humanitarian relief activities, at great personal risk, even after the international staff had to be evacuated from Afghanistan — deserve our special admiration.

Humanitarian assistance is one of the core duties of the United Nations. It is also one of the most difficult tasks to be carried out in the midst of a conflict or confrontation, and often at risk to the lives

of those involved. The humanitarian relief activities in and around Afghanistan are a typical example, and they pose a tremendous challenge to the United Nations.

In this light, the Government of Japan is determined to provide strong support for and cooperation with the efforts of the humanitarian agencies of the United Nations, coordinated by Mr. Kenzo Oshima, Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs.

The Japanese Government has already begun to extend to neighbouring countries, such as Pakistan, emergency economic cooperation, which includes assistance to Afghan refugees. In response to the donor appeal launched by Secretary-General Annan, it has also pledged to provide up to $120 million to support the relief activities for refugees and displaced persons to be carried out by United Nations agencies and other organizations. Last weekend, the Japanese Foreign Minister, Ms. Makiko Tanaka, visited a refugee camp in Pakistan.

In the view of the Japanese Government, it is important to pay due consideration to the following three points in providing humanitarian relief assistance to Afghanistan.

First, it is essential for the success of humanitarian relief efforts to ensure the safety of humanitarian personnel and their unhindered access to refugees and displaced persons. The Government of Japan therefore calls upon all Afghan forces to ensure the safety and freedom of movement of humanitarian personnel. We also urge them to refrain from acts of reprisal and to adhere strictly to international law, in particular human rights and international humanitarian law.

The Japanese Government welcomes the development whereby, under the leadership of the United Nations, the Afghan parties concerned have agreed to participate in discussions on an interim Government, which are to be held in Germany. We sincerely hope that the dialogue and related efforts will lead to political stability in Afghanistan so that the necessary humanitarian assistance activities are carried out smoothly.

Secondly, the cooperation of neighbouring countries is essential for the smooth implementation of humanitarian assistance. Some of them have already been cooperating by accepting many Afghan refugees, but the cooperation of neighbouring countries is also critically important for the transit of humanitarian relief supplies into Afghanistan. It is therefore necessary for the international community to strengthen its assistance to the neighbouring countries. The Government of Japan, for its part, has been engaged in efforts to provide emergency economic assistance to some of those countries.

Thirdly, it is important to ensure that humanitarian relief activities are followed by rehabilitation and reconstruction assistance without interruption. For this reason, it is necessary to begin at an early stage preparations for extending rehabilitation and reconstruction assistance. This would make it possible to build upon the results of humanitarian relief activities in carrying out rehabilitation and reconstruction. Moreover, rehabilitation and reconstruction assistance facilitates the return of refugees and internally displaced persons and also promotes the reintegration of ex-combatants into society. Further, giving the Afghan people the prospect of such progress will, in turn, encourage them to strive for political stability.

It is based on that line of thought that the Government of Japan, together with the Government of the United States, organized a meeting of senior officials on reconstruction assistance to Afghanistan, held in Washington on 20 November. As confirmed at the meeting, the Japanese Government intends to convene in Japan a ministerial-level conference on the reconstruction of Afghanistan, to be held during the second half of next January.

Needless to say, there are many other parts of the world where humanitarian assistance is as gravely and as urgently needed as it is in Afghanistan. That the 2001 consolidated appeal for $2.5 billion, launched by the Secretary-General a few hours ago, is targeted at 33 million people in 18 countries and regions is clear testimony to that fact. It is the responsibility of the international community to raise the funds necessary for humanitarian relief activities in such areas as West Africa, the Horn of Africa, the Great Lakes region, the North Caucasus, South-Eastern Europe and some parts of Asia.

In none of those areas can we overemphasize the importance of the three points I touched upon in connection with the Afghan situation: the safety of humanitarian personnel; regional cooperation,

including cooperation with neighbouring countries; and the seamless continuum between humanitarian assistance and efforts towards rehabilitation and reconstruction.

Natural disasters too are a grave humanitarian problem to which we must give equally serious attention. Indeed, in recent years natural disasters have been increasing in both scale and frequency all over the world. In developing countries they are a serious disruptive factor in the development process. Earthquakes in Western India and in El Salvador; exceptionally harsh winters — known as *dzud* — in Mongolia; hurricanes in Central America and the Caribbean region; typhoons in East Asia; and droughts and floods in many parts of the world: citing those disasters that have struck just in the past year gives us a clear idea of the magnitude of their destructiveness.

Natural disasters and the consequent need for humanitarian assistance occur suddenly. Thus, it is important to make preparations during normal times so that it will be possible to respond effectively to emergencies and to minimize their consequences. For that reason, the Government of Japan supported an initiative of the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs to establish in Kobe an office of ReliefWeb this year, which has made it possible to gather and disseminate information around the globe regarding humanitarian emergencies on a 24-hour basis. The Government of Japan is determined to strengthen its cooperation in efforts in that area, including those under the International Strategy for Disaster Reduction.

In addressing global issues in a wide range of areas, from poverty, environmental degradation, conflicts and refugees to natural disasters and HIV/AIDS and other infectious diseases, the Government of Japan attaches great importance to focusing attention on human security, that is on protecting the life and dignity of people. And it is, of course, in the area of humanitarian assistance where that human-centred approach is most crucial. The Government of Japan will therefore continue to strengthen its cooperation with the humanitarian assistance activities of the United Nations system from the standpoint of attaching particular importance to human security.

Ms. Iyer (India): We thank the Secretary-General for his report (A/56/95) on strengthening of the coordination of emergency humanitarian assistance of the United Nations. India attaches the highest importance to the provision of humanitarian assistance to those in need. That is why, in spite of our resource constraints, we provide substantial humanitarian assistance to those in need, in the true spirit of South-South cooperation.

We have announced economic assistance in the form of medicines, medical assistance, quilts, tents and blankets, and have committed 1 million tonnes of wheat for the needy in Afghanistan and for those displaced from that country. These will be provided through United Nations agencies, including the World Food Programme. We have also declared our intention to extend a line of credit of $100 million for post-conflict reconstruction and rehabilitation. As a country in Afghanistan's immediate neighbourhood, and with an association that goes back into history, we are ready to do more. We shall make every effort to contribute to bringing about lasting peace, stability and development in Afghanistan.

Contributions to the consolidated appeal process have been steadily declining. As of May this year, six months after the consolidated appeals were launched, only 23 per cent of the $2.8 billion requested had been funded. There is a pressing need to ensure the provision of adequate financial resources for the implementation of activities related to humanitarian assistance. Such resources, however, should be additional to, and not diverted from, the already scarce resources for development. That point has also been emphasized in the report (A/55/1000) of the High-level Panel on Financing for Development, which was chaired by His Excellency Mr. Ernesto Zedillo, former President of Mexico. As we have repeatedly said, development assistance, in the long term, reduces the need for emergency assistance by making the socio-economic system resilient in the face of the impact of hazards and disasters.

The Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs has reported that funding for humanitarian emergencies is uneven. There is quick and generous donor support for some emergencies but little for others. We welcome, in that context, the intention of the Office to carry out an analysis of donor funding and patterns to identify ways to address imbalances. We are also concerned at the increasing tendency to use bilateral agencies and international non-governmental organizations for delivering humanitarian assistance;

we are of the view that multilateral mechanisms are the appropriate channel.

In a climate of shrinking resource flows, it is also essential to ensure optimal and effective utilization of available funds. Capacities existing in developing countries, which are often available closer to the site of a natural disaster, could provide a viable means for extending limited resources. That was one of the main recommendations emanating from the agreed conclusions of the first humanitarian affairs segment of the Economic and Social Council, held in July 1998, and reiterated at the second humanitarian affairs segment, held in July 1999. We look forward to follow-up action by the Secretariat.

We are aware that there is considerable preoccupation concerning the need for incorporating a long-term perspective into the response to humanitarian crises, particularly by having mechanisms for funding the smooth transition from relief to development. We agree that this needs to be addressed. This, however, calls for donor attention, and not institutional attention. Neither the creation of new windows nor the expansion of existing ones in the funds and programmes of the United Nations can be the solution to the problem.

The Secretary-General has noted that access by humanitarian actors to affected populations is one of the key challenges facing humanitarian operations, particularly in complex emergencies. He also makes the point that many humanitarian emergencies are prefaced by escalating human rights violations. While this may be so, it is, in our view, imperative to maintain the distinctions between the political, peacekeeping, humanitarian and human rights aspects of the work of the United Nations if the trust which the United Nations system enjoys in the field of humanitarian assistance is to be maintained. We recognize that the dilemma of bringing humanitarian assistance to populations at risk, in areas of conflict and where a United Nations peacekeeping operation is deployed, can be agonizing. However, as we have often said, it is necessary to recognize that humanitarian assistance cannot be provided — and certainly not sustained — under fire.

The issue of humanitarian assistance for internally displaced persons is contentious. The Secretary-General's report refers to advocacy efforts to raise the profile of the guiding principles on internal displacement. We note, however, that these principles, which were developed only by a team of legal experts in collaboration with international agencies and non-governmental organizations, do not enjoy inter-governmental approval.

We would, in conclusion, like to refer to the guiding principles for humanitarian assistance which have been so clearly outlined in section I of the annex to resolution 46/182. These are notably the principles of humanity, neutrality and impartiality, with full respect for the sovereignty, territorial integrity and national unity of States. The resolution recognizes the primary importance of the consent of the affected countries in the organization, coordination and implementation of humanitarian assistance within its territory. These principles are valid and time-tested, and their continued application would contribute towards success in relieving pain and suffering.

Mr. Sagach (Ukraine): At the outset, I should like to express my delegation's appreciation of the reports prepared by the Secretary-General on the agenda item under consideration. They clearly and objectively reflect the ongoing activities of the United Nations system in addressing the increasing scope of humanitarian assistance issues and persuasively prove the need to further strengthen the coordination of humanitarian and disaster relief assistance rendered by the United Nations, including special economic assistance.

In particular, I would like to mention document A/56/447, entitled "Optimizing the international effort to study, mitigate and minimize the consequences of the Chernobyl disaster". This report contains deep analysis and concrete recommendations on further actions, to be undertaken at the international, regional and national levels, required to overcome the long-lasting consequences of the Chernobyl disaster, which, as it is well known, has severely affected Ukraine, as well as Belarus and the Russian Federation.

The Government of Ukraine fully endorses the new approach towards further optimization of the United Nations activities with regard to Chernobyl reflected in the report. The proposed policy shift from emergency response to developmental assistance will permit focusing international assistance, based on extensive participation on the part of the United Nations Development Programme, the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and other developmental

agencies members of the Inter-Agency Task Force on Chernobyl, as well as the World Bank and other partners, on the priority tasks to be tackled in the spheres of rehabilitation and development.

The nuclear accident that happened 15 years ago at the Chernobyl nuclear power plant has considerably influenced all spheres of human life in Ukraine, including the environment, social protection and health care, and the economy, in particular, industrial and agricultural production. More than 3.5 million people were affected by the catastrophe, among them, about 1.2 million children. More than 2.3 million people still live in contaminated areas. The overall contaminated area comprises more than 53,500 square kilometres. The aggregate amount of economic losses to date is estimated at $100 billion. Over the past decade, 5-7 per cent of the expenditures of the State budget of Ukraine, amounting to more than $6 billion, has been spent on addressing the consequences of the accident.

Today, 15 years after the catastrophe, it is hardly possible to fully estimate the scope of its long-lasting consequences. The disaster continues to cause significant material and financial losses and radiation damage. It has negatively influenced the health of the population. It would be no exaggeration to say that world science and practice had never faced the problems of such a scale and complexity as those that have stemmed from the Chernobyl accident. Regretfully, we have to admit that the chapter of the Chernobyl disaster in the history of mankind has not ended.

The outcome of the International Conference "Fifteen Years after the Chernobyl Accident, Lessons Learned", held in Kyiv last April and attended by the United Nations Under-Secretary-General, Mr. Kenzo Oshima, was further evidence of this fact.

We welcome the progress achieved in strengthening international cooperation on Chernobyl. We appreciate the activities and role of the United Nations coordinator on Chernobyl, the Under-Secretary-General, Mr. Kenzo Oshima, and his colleagues in promoting international cooperation aimed at mitigating the aftermath of the disaster and in drafting the new United Nations strategy to address the wide scope of problems that still exist. Under the leadership of the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), a broad consensus has been built within the United Nations system regarding this innovative strategy.

In our view, the role of the United Nations Quadripartite Coordination Committee on International Cooperation on Chernobyl, chaired by Mr. Oshima, should also be further strengthened in order to provide better coordination of the United Nations activities in addressing the multifaceted and complex problems caused by the accident.

The President and the Government of Ukraine, being fully aware of their responsibility towards the people of my country and the entire world, are taking consistent steps to minimize and mitigate the consequences of the Chernobyl disaster. One of these steps was the closure of the Chernobyl nuclear power plant on 15 December 2000. The historic significance of this action has won wide international recognition and was reaffirmed in a resolution unanimously adopted by the General Assembly at its previous session. By taking this important, though economically and socially difficult, decision Ukraine has reconfirmed its international commitments, in particular, those under the Ottawa memorandum on the closure of the plant.

In his address on the occasion of the Chernobyl plant closure, the President of Ukraine, Mr. Leonid Kuchma, stated that we were ready freely to share with the international community our unique though bitter experience, accumulated over years of eliminating the consequences of Chernobyl, and to elaborate a series of measures guaranteeing safe, healthy and sound living conditions for everyone, everywhere on earth. The President of Ukraine proposes using the area around the Chernobyl plant as a testing ground for the International Scientific and Technological Centre.

Nuclear safety technologies, technologies for the minimization and elimination of the consequences of nuclear accidents, environmental rehabilitation technologies and others could successfully be studied and developed at the site, in the interests of humanity as a whole and for the sake of present and future generations.

I would like to express our strong belief that the decommissioning of the plant should not cause the question of Chernobyl to be removed from the global agenda. With the passing of the years since the disaster, the need to strengthen the coordinated efforts of the international community aimed at addressing its

consequences is becoming even more evident and important. The scope and long-term nature of the consequences of Chernobyl have proved that it is not only an internal issue and a matter of concern for Ukraine, but, once again, a question requiring global attention.

We in Ukraine appreciate what has already been done by the international community to assist my country in mitigating and minimizing the consequences of the Chernobyl disaster, in particular the activities under the Shelter Implementation Plan, adopted by the G-7 Summit in Denver in June 1997, aimed at securing the environmental safety of the sarcophagus covering the destroyed Chernobyl reactor; and the activities under the United Nations Chernobyl Programme — launched in July 2000 jointly by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the Government of Ukraine, with the financial support of the Administration of the United States of America — aimed at addressing the numerous socio-psychological, medical and environmental problems related to Chernobyl. Let me also mention other important projects in different spheres, implemented with the assistance of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), the International Atomic Energy Agency, the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, as well as by other international organizations, non-governmental organizations and funds.

Finally, I would like to refer here to the visit of the multidisciplinary inter-agency United Nations mission to Ukraine, Belarus and the Russian Federation, which visited our countries this summer, and the mission of Mr. Kalman Mizsei, United Nations Deputy Coordinator of International Cooperation on Chernobyl and Director of the UNDP Regional Bureau for Europe and the Commonwealth of Independent States, to those countries in October of this year. The findings and the outcome of the missions, the independent analysis of the current situation in the Chernobyl-affected areas, as well as concrete proposals on the projects to be implemented in different spheres connected with mitigation of the consequences of Chernobyl, are to be compiled in a separate report, which is expected to be presented shortly and incorporated into the new United Nations strategy to mitigate the consequences of the disaster.

We are sincerely grateful for and appreciate the assistance provided by the donor community, international organizations, non-governmental organizations and funds to Ukraine in past years. It is our firm belief that the international community will continue to support the efforts of the Chernobyl-affected countries to mitigate the consequences of the disaster, and that the coordinating role of the United Nations in the field of international cooperation on Chernobyl will be maintained and strengthened.

The delegations of Ukraine, Belarus and the Russian Federation, jointly with the delegations of the Czech Republic, Honduras, Israel, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Romania, Slovakia, Tajikistan and the United States of America intend to submit shortly for consideration by the General Assembly a draft resolution on "Strengthening of international cooperation and coordination of efforts to study, mitigate and minimize the consequences of the Chernobyl disaster". We call upon delegations to support this draft resolution, and we express our hope that this year, as in previous years, it will also be adopted by consensus.

I would like also to refer to another issue that is important to the delegation of Ukraine — that of economic assistance to the Eastern European States affected by the developments in the Balkans.

The sanctions imposed by the Security Council, applied for a long period against Yugoslavia; the crisis in Kosovo; and the well-known events of 1999 in the Balkans have had a negative impact on my country's economy, which suffered significant losses as a consequence of the disruption of trade and economic links with many European countries and the interruption of navigation on the Danube. The losses incurred by shipping companies and ports alone from 1999 through the first half of 2001 are estimated at about $160 million.

Ukraine is not the only country that has faced such problems. Many other States in the region have also suffered economic losses.

Regrettably, despite the decisions taken by the General Assembly, assistance to the affected States in their efforts to overcome the negative consequences of the recent events in the Balkans has not, in our view, been sufficient.

We are grateful to the Secretary-General for his report on the subject. The report clearly identifies the persistent special economic problems which these

States are confronting. We agree with the conclusions contained in that document (A/56/632).

We believe that further measures should be undertaken by the international community in order to ensure the economic growth and development of the States of the region, in particular the development of transport and of the infrastructure, as well as the full resumption of navigation on the Danube river. We encourage States and international organizations, as well as international financial institutions, to continue to render assistance in order to support the efforts undertaken by the countries of the region themselves.

In this connection, the delegation of Ukraine has elaborated a draft resolution on special economic assistance to the Eastern European States affected by the developments in the Balkans, which will shortly also be submitted to the Assembly. I should like to avail myself of this opportunity to express our sincere hope that the draft resolution on this agenda item will receive, as it has previously, the broad support of delegations and will be adopted by consensus by the General Assembly at its fifty-sixth session.

Mr. Shen Guofang (China) (*spoke in Chinese*): It has been almost 10 years since the adoption by the General Assembly of resolution 46/182 in 1991. The Chinese delegation appreciates the great efforts made by the relevant United Nations bodies throughout these years in strengthening the coordination of humanitarian assistance. I would also like to express appreciation for the efforts made by non-governmental organizations in humanitarian relief work.

We must also note, however, that in the first year of this new century the world is not as peaceful as we would like it to be. New armed conflicts have broken out here and there, refugee problems are getting worse and the number of natural disasters has increased, leading to enormous loss of life and property. The international community still has a long and difficult road ahead of it, therefore, in order to ensure that humanitarian assistance is carried out in an orderly and smooth manner and to achieve tangible results.

The Chinese delegation would like to comment on some of the problems referred to in the Secretary-General's report. First, when providing humanitarian assistance, the United Nations and the international community should always strictly observe the guiding principles of the Charter, such as humanitarianism, neutrality and impartiality, as well as respect for sovereignty, territorial integrity and national unity. The relevant agencies of the United Nations and other regional organizations should do their jobs in accordance with their responsibilities. Without the application of these principles, it will be very difficult for humanitarian assistance efforts to achieve the required outcome. Worse still, new humanitarian disasters could very well result.

Secondly, as the Secretary-General has indicated in his report, experience over the past 10 years has shown that humanitarian assistance cannot be a substitute for political action. In many cases, without coordinated political and diplomatic efforts, it is impossible properly to resolve crises. The Chinese delegation would like to emphasize that when providing assistance, the international community should consider it a priority to eradicate the roots of humanitarian crises so as to prevent them from recurring.

Thirdly, resolution 46/182 has proved its effectiveness over the past 10 years. Today, as the humanitarian situation is rapidly deteriorating, that resolution can still provide important guidance for humanitarian efforts by the United Nations. We hope that the relevant agencies of the United Nations will strictly abide by the provisions of that resolution in carrying out humanitarian assistance efforts so as to achieve truly effective results.

Fourthly, the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) has done a great deal of work and achieved good results in the field of international humanitarian affairs over the past year. We would like to express our appreciation for that. We hope that OCHA will be able to obtain sufficient financial resources for its operations; with a sound financial basis for its global humanitarian efforts in place, it would be able to respond more effectively to emergency situations.

Lastly, I would like to comment on the White Helmets initiative. As a mechanism, established by countries on a voluntary basis for responding to disasters and emergencies, the White Helmets initiative complements humanitarian assistance efforts in an important and useful way. The Chinese delegation believes that the initiative is a positive one that will contribute to the strengthening of the capacity of all countries, in particular developing countries, in disaster preparedness and disaster reduction. Its potential is yet

to be fully tapped. We hope that the relevant United Nations agencies will carry out in-depth studies in this regard and make full use of the White Helmets initiative as the international community takes action to deal with natural disasters.

Mr. Siv (United States of America): I welcome the opportunity to speak on this agenda item and thank the Secretary-General for his thoughtful report on humanitarian assistance.

World attention is currently focused on Afghanistan. There is a need for an effective and well-coordinated relief and reconstruction effort there. The international community is committed to helping the Afghan people. In this regard, it is important for the United Nations to continue to play a central and vital role.

This effort should provide a positive vision for the future of Afghanistan. It must be linked to a broad-based government that represents and protects human rights. It needs to apply to individuals of every ethnic background and region — women as well as men. Indeed, in all of our efforts — relief, rehabilitation and reconstruction — we must ensure that women play prominent roles as planners, implementers and beneficiaries. The Afghan people must play a central role in rebuilding their societies. They should be involved at all levels: national, provincial, local and grass roots. We encourage the Afghan diaspora to make an important economic contribution, as well.

There are a number of issues that must be addressed before and throughout the reconstruction process in Afghanistan. First, the safety and security of humanitarian workers must be ensured. Secondly, the United Nations, international organizations, donors and non-governmental organizations must have safe access to affected populations.

Thirdly, mines must be cleared so that refugees and internally displaced persons can return safely to their homes. Fourthly, schools must be re-opened and made available to students of every ethnic background and region, girls as well as boys. By re-opening the schools, the long-term goal of educating the future leaders of Afghanistan will be better met. It will also help address the more immediate goals of allowing families and communities to restore order to their lives, while providing employment and income for Afghan teachers.

Fifthly, health-care systems must be re-established and made available to all men and women, boys and girls. Sixthly, agriculture — including providing seeds for planting, repairing irrigation systems and restoring family farms — must be high on the list of reconstruction priorities.

In order to survive the years of fear and misery, the people of Afghanistan drew deeply on their own courage, ingenuity, skill and faith. We will help them draw on those same strengths to recover and thrive in a twenty-first-century world. Through close cooperation and the disciplined management of international assistance, progress in Afghanistan will be made.

Although the world's headlines remain focused on Afghanistan, we cannot forget other humanitarian emergencies and natural disasters around the world. We believe that the Secretary-General's report offers sound recommendations for improving our response to those crises. In particular, the United States endorses the following recommendations contained in the report.

First, access to vulnerable populations is paramount to relief efforts. The Emergency Relief Coordinator must be able to negotiate improved access. By his doing so, the delivery of humanitarian assistance will be greatly enhanced.

Secondly, the Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) has played a key role in improving the effectiveness and efficiency of humanitarian operations. We support a strengthened role for the IASC to improve the coordination of humanitarian response. In this regard, however, serious concerns remain. For example, problems continue within the inter-agency process in selecting resident and humanitarian coordinators and deploying them in a timely fashion. We must do better.

Thirdly, we welcome the more efficient use of the Central Emergency Revolving Fund (CERF). We support expanding the use of the CERF to include humanitarian assistance resulting from natural disasters. We also endorse its use for requirements in protracted emergencies and for security arrangements for United Nations and associated personnel.

Fourthly, we urge all Governments, including my own, to better coordinate the allocation of resources to the consolidated appeals process. In doing so, we will ensure that our funding supports the integrated strategy expressed in the appeal.

Fifthly, we recognize that the international community is more likely to respond at the beginning of a crisis. We recognize, however, that funding is equally crucial when a country or region is beginning to get back on its feet. We therefore encourage more Governments to become donors. We also invite donors to explore ways that will increase funding for transitional activities.

The United States also supports the Secretary-General's recommendations on groups with special needs. Relief efforts must build on the strengths of the affected populations. These individuals should be involved in distributing humanitarian assistance, as well as in rehabilitation and peace-building activities.

Women need to be involved in preventing and resolving conflicts. Their participation is essential for maintaining peace and promoting security. All humanitarian agencies should provide human rights and gender training for their staff. A gender perspective needs to be integrated into all humanitarian efforts in order to ensure that the capabilities and needs of men and women are taken into account.

We support the Secretary-General's efforts to strengthen the capacity of the United Nations system to better address the needs of internally displaced persons. In our doing so, the accountability of the United Nations system in responding to this population will be further enhanced.

Finally, my Government maintains a strong commitment to natural disaster relief and mitigation. We support the objectives proposed by the Secretary-General in the International Strategy for Disaster Reduction. In particular, we endorse his calls for closer ties to non-United Nations entities working in disaster management. It is important to bolster the capacity of national and regional authorities to conduct their own disaster management. We also commend United Nations agencies for developing close ties to disaster information programmes, such as ReliefWeb, and we encourage broader use of standard information-sharing formats.

As we heard this morning during the global launch of the consolidated appeals process, millions of individuals throughout the globe face immense humanitarian needs. The efforts of all of us — the United Nations agencies, the donors, the Red Cross-Red Crescent movement, the private non-governmental agencies and the host Governments — all need to be strong and well-coordinated so that those needs are met to the best of our abilities.

Mr. Fonseca (Brazil): There is an ongoing debate concerning the obstacles to the effective delivery of assistance to those in need. We often ask what is the main obstacle that thwarts humanitarian assistance. For some, it is a matter of scant resources; for others, the attacks perpetrated against humanitarian workers and the lack of a safe and secure environment.

In fact, depending on the situation, different combinations of factors — such as lack of resources, a shaky security environment and difficulties in ensuring coordination — enter into play and can hinder the delivery of humanitarian assistance.

The time is ripe to overcome the politicization of the debate and to adopt a fresh perspective with regard to the role of the United Nations in providing humanitarian assistance. In our view, it is sufficient to reaffirm at the political level that General Assembly resolution 46/182 continues to provide the framework for United Nations humanitarian activities. This is the overarching political statement we need to make in order to avoid misgivings and to take a more cooperative and less confrontational stance in this field.

Misgivings can also be avoided by what I would call confidence-building measures. Relatively simple ideas can create a whole new window of opportunities. As we stressed during this year's humanitarian segment of the Economic and Social Council, we can improve further the flow of information and open up new channels for a more systematic and smooth exchange of views among the Secretariat, the Economic and Social Council and other United Nations organs. We are pleased to note that the Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs, Mr. Kenzo Oshima, has initiated the practice of briefing the Economic and Social Council and interested delegations on the work of the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs.

I would like to highlight three broad areas that are inescapable in any attempt to improve the performance of the system: prevention, coordination and protection.

Although emergency relief for natural disasters is essential, preparedness is also crucial. International assistance, including in the field of long-term development, is key in this regard and can make a

difference in mitigating damage and reducing the need for post-disaster aid and reconstruction. Natural and man-made disasters alike continue to cause pain and suffering all over the world, while the resources to alleviate their consequences and enhance prevention efforts fall short of what is needed.

Prevention has an equally important role to play when it comes to so-called complex emergencies. In this context, prevention involves the construction of solid pillars for a peaceful society through cooperation for development, poverty eradication and the strengthening of the rule of law. The report of the Secretary-General on the prevention of armed conflict is an important contribution to this end and deals with prevention as a cross-cutting issue. It rightly stresses that prevention requires the coordination of various United Nations organs and other relevant actors and stakeholders. Coordination is also essential, and we should build on experiences such as the joint disaster response and recovery mission undertaken in all countries affected by Hurricane Mitch and on other lessons learned during emergencies. Therefore, we attach great importance to the contribution that can be made by the General Assembly, the Security Council and ECOSOC in their respective spheres of competence with a view to producing synergy in the realm of humanitarian assistance. Joint meetings of United Nations organs can help to create an environment conducive to increased interaction and cooperation.

In the area of protection, let me mention three issues: access of humanitarian personnel to those in need and the responsibility of States; safety and security of humanitarian personnel; and the question of internally displaced persons.

States have the primary responsibility in the delivery of assistance to their populations. But if they are unable to do so, they must comply with their international obligations to ensure safe and unhindered access of humanitarian personnel to those in need. We know that crises of refugees and internal displacement have multiple causes. It is disturbing to find that systematic violation of human rights is among the most frequent of them. It is extremely important to strengthen the advocacy efforts of the United Nations system and act to halt abuses and to ensure that those responsible are held accountable for their crimes.

In today's conflicts, the distinction between combatants and civilians is often blurred and the consequences are frequently tragic. Humanitarian workers and the civilian population suffer the most as the result of the highly complex environment of today's conflicts. They are increasingly targeted and often become victims of either deliberate or random violence. The number of civilian staff killed in the service of the United Nations is shocking. Many non-United Nations humanitarian workers have also been victimized.

Last year's report of the Secretary-General on this issue put forward a number of recommendations to strengthen the United Nations security management system. We must act promptly on them. Brazil ratified the 1994 Convention on the Safety of United Nations and Associated Personnel during the Millennium Summit. We hope that the Sixth Committee will give priority to the proposal of the Secretary-General with a view to widening the scope of protection under the 1994 Convention. Again this year, Brazil will co-sponsor the draft resolution on safety and security of humanitarian personnel and protection of humanitarian personnel.

With regard to the serious question of internally displaced persons, it is necessary to adopt concrete measures to alleviate their plight. There are millions of internally displaced persons in the world, the majority of them living under precarious conditions. We welcome the intention of the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs to strengthen its capacity to support the response of the operational agencies to the needs of the internally displaced. We also support the work of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General and encourage him to continue to establish a dialogue with Governments with a view to establishing or strengthening the local framework of protections for internally displaced persons. The use of the Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement by a number of Member States is a positive development.

Donors must fulfil their pledges and increase their contributions to meet the requirements of the consolidated appeal process. This also includes the so-called forgotten emergencies, those crises that are out of the limelight of the international media. Recipient countries must show the political will to facilitate the provision of humanitarian assistance and address the causes of crises. Moreover, all of us must adopt a

generous, victim-centred approach to humanitarian emergencies.

In conclusion, allow me to honour all those who have paid the ultimate price while trying to provide some hope for the underprivileged of the world.

Mr. Laperche (Argentina) (*spoke in Spanish*): It is my honour to speak in this plenary meeting on behalf of my Government on the occasion of the consideration of agenda item 20, "Strengthening of the coordination of humanitarian and disaster relief assistance of the United Nations, including special economic assistance". I would like to refer to sub-item (d), "Participation of volunteers, 'White Helmets', in the activities of the United Nations in the field of humanitarian relief, rehabilitation and technical cooperation for development".

My delegation wishes to thank the Secretary-General for his report, contained in document A/56/308, on the White Helmets Initiative, which constitutes the basic document for the consideration of the sub-item to which I have referred. I also wish to express appreciation for the continuous and committed support given to the Initiative by the United Nations volunteers and the agencies of the United Nations system in the countries where we have worked together.

In this connection, I must also mention the sustained trust and encouragement that the Initiative has received from the United Nations Development Programme, whose role in the field of international cooperation for development our Government acknowledges and supports. Our permanent contacts give us reason to envision even more intense collaboration in the future, taking full advantage of new initiatives with regard to wider partnerships.

Finally, it is a debt of honour for us to recognize the important guidance that the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, in both New York and Geneva, has always provided with respect to the joint activities that have taken place in Mozambique, Kosovo, El Salvador and East Timor, among other places.

As the Secretary-General pointed out in his report, the White Helmets has proved, through its activities and results, to be a valuable instrument in the field of cooperation and in the financing and mobilization of resources. Although the White Helmets Commission of Argentina has carried out the largest number of activities, many other countries have established coordination centres to study the possibilities for expanding the Initiative and achieving its objectives.

The report of the Secretary-General shows clearly the Initiative's good course of gradual and continuous progress, confirmed through a broadening network of agreements and institutional contacts with, among other organizations, the World Food Programme; the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization; the Organization of American States; the Inter-American Development Bank; the United Nations Children's Fund; the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees; the European Parliament; and the Organization of African Unity.

I wish to express my gratitude for the views that the Secretary-General expressed in his report, which affirms the validity of the concept of the White Helmets as standby volunteer teams, previously identified and trained, available to the United Nations to provide immediate support for relief, rehabilitation, reconstruction and development activities. It is within this context that Argentina will introduce shortly a draft resolution on the White Helmets Initiative for consideration by the General Assembly.

My Government wishes to take this opportunity to confirm its commitment to the Initiative and to express its belief that the Initiative deserves the sustained support of all members of the international community.

As the Secretary-General has pointed out on more than one occasion, the active participation of civil society in United Nations activities is a prerequisite for the success of humanitarian relief missions. We are convinced that the availability of White Helmets volunteers is one of the useful, effective and efficient ways to ensure orderly and growing participation in these activities. As in previous years, the draft resolution will contain the concepts necessary to contribute to such a task and will give Member States, through the strengthening and broadening of consultation mechanisms, the responsibility for ensuring the necessary political guidance that this international cooperation instrument requires. The interest shown by many Member States and sectors of civil society in the concept and features of White Helmets, as well as its potential replication, has led the

Secretariat to consider that its implementation adequately meets the relevant requirements of the General Assembly.

This draft resolution will also include our regional perspective in its reference to the consideration given to the While Helmet Initiative by the Southern Cone Common Market (MERCOSUR), which is made up of Argentina, Brazil, Paraguay and Uruguay and its associated countries Bolivia and Chile. In this respect, the workshop seminar "White Helmets in MERCOSUR: Regional humanitarian will" was recently held. It is our understanding that that dimension will help improve the efficiency of common effort and expand the base of human resources available at the regional level. We encourage other regional associations to consider this approach with the hope that it represents a step towards a more effective and far-reaching humanitarian assistance mechanism.

I would not wish to conclude without expressing my Government's constant concern and my own concern at the risky security conditions that humanitarian personnel must face on the ground. It is very unfortunate that those men and women, who volunteer their hearts, bodies and minds to restore the well-being of needy people, should themselves be the target of the most irrational violence. Expressing our concern about that serious situation is not enough. It is our responsibility to express very clearly our sense of revulsion at that violence and to take the necessary steps to prevent its recurrence.

Mr. Sun Joun-yung (Republic of Korea): At the outset, I would like to express my appreciation to the Secretary-General for his comprehensive reports on this agenda item. In our view, the reports encompass all key aspects of humanitarian assistance and illuminate the way forward in this field.

This year marks the tenth anniversary of the creation of a United Nations humanitarian assistance mechanism, comprised of the Emergency Relief Coordinator, the Inter-Agency Standing Committee, the Central Emergency Revolving Fund and the Consolidated Appeals Process. My delegation believes that, in the decade since its inception, this mechanism has greatly enhanced the efficiency and effectiveness of United Nations humanitarian operations by strengthening the coordination of emergency humanitarian activities, with the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs as the focal point.

In the past decade, we have witnessed an exponential growth in the scale and number of natural disasters, a trend that continues to this day. These natural disasters have tended to recur in the same forms and in the same regions, such as the droughts in the Horn of Africa and in central and southern Asia, the floods in Mozambique and Asia and the earthquakes in Latin America and India.

Given this fact, there is no disputing the increasing need to adopt preventive strategies that minimize the risk and impact of disasters. One such approach is to strengthen early-warning systems by promoting information-sharing at the regional and national levels, as well as to enhance the awareness and responsibility of regional bodies for humanitarian response.

In this regard, it is noteworthy that the Pan American Health Organization of the World Health Organization has made significant progress in developing an effective response to disasters in the Americas and the Caribbean and that the establishment of a southern African regional mechanism for disaster management is under way. My delegation supports the Secretary-General's recommendation that the Asian region, the world's most disaster-prone continent, also establish a regional disaster assessment and coordination mechanism.

In the case of complex emergencies, which have intensified in many parts of the world, more wide-ranging efforts are required. To prevent the expansion of humanitarian crises, it is especially important to adopt an integrated strategy that encompasses all phases, from early response to mitigation and rehabilitation in the post-conflict stages. The United Nations has made great progress in this respect, preparing inter-agency contingency plans and developing relief web sites to ensure widespread access to comprehensive and up-to-date information.

In carrying out these humanitarian activities, special attention should be paid to internally displaced persons, particularly women and children. Women are not only a vulnerable group, but they are also key actors of positive change in conflict and post-conflict situations. In this regard, the Member States of the United Nations will have to endeavour to establish a

culture of protection based on international humanitarian law.

The culture of protection should also apply to aid workers. We are pleased to note the adoption of a resolution recognizing the need to consider the safety and security of locally recruited personnel and establishing an ad hoc committee to consider the recommendations made by the Secretary-General in his report to enhance the protective legal regime for United Nations and associated personnel.

The perils faced by humanitarian workers were vividly brought to light by a recent incident in Afghanistan in which eight Western aid workers were detained for three months before being released. In the light of the close working relationship that exists between the United Nations humanitarian agencies and non-governmental organizations, whose roles are increasing, my delegation believes that appropriate protection for non-United Nations humanitarian personnel is also needed, beyond the sharing of security information.

In recent years, the international community has been confronted with a number of serious humanitarian challenges, the most current being the situation in Afghanistan. The humanitarian situation in this country has dramatically deteriorated during 22 years of conflict driven by ethnic, tribal and religious factors and has been exacerbated by the worst drought in 30 years. Recently, the international community, with close coordination between international agencies, has made its utmost effort to provide humanitarian assistance in spite of various constraints.

Now we are at a critical stage, entering the transitional period leading to a post-Taliban Afghanistan. We will have to continue to deploy humanitarian operations and prepare to rebuild the country, while ensuring security and order. This challenging task requires a comprehensive approach designed to bring together all the elements that we are endeavouring to foster: a sense of urgency, coordinated and effective planning, the security of aid workers, a gender perspective, coordination between political, peacekeeping and humanitarian actors, a close connection between short-term relief assistance and long-term development, and so on.

Indeed, the coordinated efforts of all actors, backed by the political will and support of Member States, are key to the success of humanitarian operations. This is particularly so in responding to complex emergencies.

The Republic of Korea stands ready to take part in these efforts. In addition to its pledge of emergency humanitarian and economic assistance worth $12 million in kind and in cash to Afghanistan and its neighbouring countries, the Korean Government will continue to participate in the reconstruction of post-conflict Afghanistan.

I would like to conclude by reaffirming our commitment to further enhancing humanitarian response capacities in a systematic, effective and sustained manner in the process of dealing with the situation in Afghanistan.

Mr. Lorenzo (Mexico) *(spoke in Spanish)*: Humanitarian assistance is one of the most noble expressions of international solidarity and cooperation in the face of the challenges which, at the global scale, are presented to us by nature and by emergency situations created by the eruption and persistence of conflicts.

Humanitarian assistance is a complicated task that requires clear and well-defined rules. Accordingly, Mexico supports the guiding principles established in General Assembly resolution 46/182. This important resolution constitutes, at the same time, a plan of action and a standard of conduct for extending international solidarity and cooperation. This type of assistance must be provided in accordance with the principles of humanity, neutrality and impartiality. It should also be provided within the framework of full respect for the sovereignty, territorial integrity and national unity of States, in accordance with the United Nations Charter and always at the request, or with the consent, of the receiving State.

Humanitarian assistance should support recovery and development in the long term. After the initial relief phase, international cooperation and support for the rehabilitation and reconstruction of the country should be pursued with sustained intensity. The rehabilitation phase should represent an opportunity to restructure and improve destroyed installations and services interrupted as a result of natural disasters and conflict.

In this task, the United Nations must play a central role to provide leadership and to coordinate the efforts of the international community. Mexico is

convinced that prevention is always better than a cure. Accordingly, we wish to assert that sustainable development is, and continues to be, the best deterrent to conflict and, at the same time, the best defence against the vicissitudes of nature. We also reiterate the importance of strengthening international cooperation for development.

In recent years, the impact of natural disasters has increased significantly in terms of the number of catastrophes and victims, as well as the magnitude of the damage caused, with profound social consequences and severe alterations to the developing economies of the nations affected. In 1999 alone there were more than 700 large-scale disasters that caused the deaths of approximately 100,000 people and caused economic loss amounting to more than $100 billion; this reflects an annual increase of approximately 10 per cent during the 1990s.

The Secretary-General's report on international cooperation for humanitarian assistance in the field of natural disasters clearly reflects the constant increase of the vulnerability of people to natural disasters, particularly in developing countries. This report also shows us that the probability of persons dying as a result of natural disasters is four times higher in low-income countries than in high-income countries, and it also warns us that the average cost of disasters in terms of the gross domestic product (GDP) can be 20 times greater in developing countries than in industrialized countries.

Mexico is convinced that humanitarian assistance must help to reduce effectively the vulnerability of countries, particularly developing countries, to natural disasters. We therefore believe that humanitarian assistance must promote a better response capacity and should promote the adoption of measures to help reduce long-term risks, including prevention and mitigation. Only in this way will it be possible to achieve effective transition from relief to development. Based on this belief, Mexico, for the third consecutive year, is co-sponsoring the draft resolution of the General Assembly on international cooperation for humanitarian assistance in the field of natural disasters, from the emergency phase to the work of reconstruction and development.

The Government of Mexico wishes to reiterate its condolences to and its solidarity with all countries that face natural disasters and other types of emergencies.

We also share international concern about the safety of humanitarian workers. We believe this issue is a central element in the effectiveness of humanitarian assistance. We express our full support for humanitarian personnel, and we extend our condolences to the family members of humanitarian workers who have lost their lives in carrying out their duties.

Mr. Morales (Panama) *(spoke in Spanish)*: The delegation of Panama, speaking on behalf of Belize, Costa Rica, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Nicaragua and Panama, is honoured to address this plenary meeting of the General Assembly on agenda item 20. In the general item, entitled "Strengthening of the coordination of humanitarian and disaster relief assistance of the United Nations, including special economic assistance", Central America attaches particular importance to its Alliance for Sustainable Development as the subregional political framework reflected in the region's commitment to sustainable development.

The report of the Secretary-General contained in document A/56/158 examines in depth the economic situation in Central America in the past few years, and also gives many details about the problems of cooperation that occurred since the previous report. It is important to recognize the great value of the Secretary-General's report and to express our satisfaction at the impeccable way in which it has been presented.

The Alliance for Sustainable Development in Central America has been a suitable mechanism for the establishment of subregional priorities in the economic, social, political, cultural and environmental areas. We have directed our efforts towards greater and more effective harmonization of macroeconomic policies and towards greater modernization of our energy, transport and telecommunications infrastructures. We have also made significant progress towards the consolidation of peace based on democratic processes and unambiguous respect for human rights.

In this context, it is important to mention the work of the Coordination Center for the Prevention of Natural Disasters in Central America; its work has been very useful for the subregion, given our vulnerability to natural disasters. The Center has been able to assist countries to develop more effective strategies for the mitigation of the impact of natural

disasters and has devoted efforts to the establishment of early warning networks in the various countries in the region. Similarly, a meeting of subregional experts was recently held in San José, Costa Rica, to take up the question of armed forces and the environment with a view to studying the potential for coordination and to identify national assistance requirements in the event of natural disasters. These regional and subregional mechanisms are considered as potentially highly effective tools for greater coordination of humanitarian assistance in affected countries.

The sustained support of the international community and the United Nations system for the efforts of the countries of the Central American region is vital to achieving the goals contained in the plan of action of our Alliance for Sustainable Development. Only the mobilization of appropriate resources to support this initiative will make it possible for Central America to alleviate extreme poverty and bring the subregion the most precious benefits of sustainable development.

Mr. Heinbecker (Canada) (*spoke in French*): Humanitarian assistance is of cardinal importance to the victims of natural disasters and other emergencies.

Beginning with that first, basic principle, the General Assembly set out the essential framework and tools to facilitate international coordination and action in response to emergencies. The drafters of resolution 46/182 were remarkably far-sighted in placing appropriate emphasis on policy and practice. Given the challenges currently unfolding in Afghanistan and elsewhere, it is appropriate that we mark the tenth anniversary of that resolution and the mechanisms established as a result.

The environment in which humanitarian operations are undertaken has changed significantly in scope and complexity over the last decade. This is especially true with respect to the terrible increase in the targeting of civilian populations during conflicts. Nevertheless, the issues and challenges outlined in resolution 46/182 remain highly relevant.

(*spoke in English*)

Whether it is State responsibility, international engagement, prevention, coordination, cooperation and leadership or the transition from relief to development, not a single day goes by here when these issues are not at the centre of international responses to humanitarian crises. This is not to say that these tools and mechanisms may not need refining from time to time. While resolution 46/182 outlines the best-case scenario, far too often the reality we are confronted with on the ground is vastly worse. To remain relevant, mechanisms set up on even the most solid foundations must be responsive to new and changing circumstances.

If we consider the experiences of the last 10 years in our responses to both natural disasters and complex emergencies, there are three challenges that consistently stand out with respect to the effective implementation of the principles outlined in resolution 46/182. Those are coordination, resources and political will. Let me discuss each in turn.

Coordination is never easy, and in the humanitarian context is made even more complicated by competition for finite resources and, most often, a multiplicity of actors. When it happens, poor coordination among United Nations actors can have devastating consequences for vulnerable populations, affecting the timeliness and efficiency of our collective response. Concern does persist over in-fighting among agencies but, even so, important strides have been made. Those include developing the responsibilities of the Emergency Relief Coordinator, outlining the functions of the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) and transforming mechanisms such as the consolidated appeals process and the Inter-Agency Standing Committee. Also of note are the evolution of United Nations Disaster Assessment and Coordination Stand-by Teams; efforts to create better links between the political, military, human rights, humanitarian and development arms of the United Nations; and moves to clarify accountability lines for Humanitarian and Resident Coordinators.

Recent steps by the Emergency Relief Coordinator in Afghanistan are illustrative of what we have learned. The timeliness of the decision to appoint regional focal points, for example, was welcome. The response of the United Nations to meeting the needs of internally displaced persons will be another important litmus test. Action in the areas of the collective commitment to the Internally Displaced Persons Unit within OCHA, the application of the supplementary guidance by country teams and the follow-up to the recommendations made by the Senior Inter-Agency Network on Internal Displacement will be an important

indicator of how far agencies have moved towards embracing coordination.

Closely linked to the first challenge of effective coordination is the second challenge, namely, resources. The provision of adequate, timely and flexible financial and human resources can greatly enhance the ability of the agencies to fulfil the tasks we give them. Unfortunately, we have seen that financial flows are often not commensurate with needs and vary from crisis to crisis. Closer donor collaboration and the leveraging of resources is essential to meet our demands better. Moreover, if we are serious about coordination, then we must be prepared to invest in it. A clearer picture of funding patterns would help in this respect. We welcome OCHA's decision to initiate a study on this subject over the coming year.

While we strongly support the Consolidated Appeals Process, better subscription is dependent on individual agency performance and on its ability to demonstrate results. We must also explore the development and implementation of more creative funding and capacity building mechanisms to deal with the transition between relief and development. That would include Governments, which should focus on resolving structural obstacles in their own capitals that inhibit transition support. Too often, we undermine our own humanitarian investments by failing to put countries emerging from crisis on the footing needed for sustainable peace and stability. Where possible, affected countries should also contribute, and in so doing demonstrate their commitment to meeting the needs of their vulnerable populations.

That ties into the third challenge associated with the implementation of resolution 46/182, namely, political will and the role of affected countries. The resolution appropriately balanced emphasis between the primary responsibilities of affected States to meet the needs of populations within their territory and the role of the international community where those States cannot acquit those obligations. This has tended to work extremely well in the context of natural disasters, less so with respect to conflicts, where tensions between the principles set out in the 46/182 and the reality on the ground are most apparent.

Access is a case in point. In many environments, humanitarian actors are present but not able to reach affected populations. That can be due to security, but also to the policies of authorities controlling a given area. Sovereignty implies responsibility by affected States for their civilian populations. It is also a shared responsibility. The international community can play an important role in helping authorities to fulfil their responsibilities to initiate, organize and implement humanitarian aid.

While progress in the areas highlighted would improve international responses to humanitarian emergencies, we must be mindful that even if we have the coordination, money and a responsive affected State, without a secure environment, assistance may still fail to reach those most in need. The reduction in safety and security for humanitarian personnel is an area that has changed dramatically over recent years. Attacks against aid workers are carried out with impunity. The General Assembly has spent much time talking about the safety and security of personnel, but only this year has it — have we — taken concrete steps to do something about it. We in Canada are very pleased that the Sixth Committee has agreed to strike a working group to consider the Secretary-General's recommendations on strengthening the legal protections of United Nations and associated personnel. We are also optimistic that the United Nations security management system can and will be strengthened by receiving increased regular budget funding. These are important steps, which have been a long time coming. We must now ensure that they make a difference out in the field.

In closing, let me reiterate that it is essential to recall that protection and assistance to civilian populations is ultimately the goal of resolution 46/182. We are not interested in coordination for its own sake, but because it is a means to an end. The end is to ensure that humanitarian assistance reaches the victims of natural disasters and other emergencies. It is critical that we not lose sight of that objective, and it is crucial that we focus our energy on achieving results for the victims.

The meeting rose at 6.05 p.m.